

Monday, September 23, 1985 Press Release

its real basis was in social, educational, cultural, class or economic issue beyond the Court's ability to address.

"To avoid arousing unrealistic expectations that the court would deal with issues beyond the Judiciary's competence," Lipscher said, "the Court asked the Davis committee to sort out these complex problems and define them to facilitate the work of the future public members."

Lipscher said the report was treated as an internal document to allow participants to speak freely so the Court would have a full appreciation of the depth of the problems perceived by minorities.

He said the committee gave the Court a "valuable insight into the sense of alienation experienced by minorities and suggested many important avenues for further exploration."

"This task force," the Chief Justice said, "demonstrates our continuing concern about the need to achieve equal access in our court system."

Previously, the Court formed task forces to address access to equal justice for women and linguistic minorities.

Initial members fo the Task Force on Minority Concerns include 10 Superior Court trial judges, an Appellate Division judge, three municipal court judges, Lipscher and Stanley C. VanNess, former Public Advocate.

Other members include Judge James H. Coleman, Jr. of the Appellate Division, who headed the preliminary committee; Superior Court Judges Betty Lester, John J. Dios and Marilyn Loftus, all of Essex; John E. Wallace of Camden; Dennis J. Braithwaite of Atlantic, James F. Madden of Bergen,

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ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE OF THE COURTS
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CN-037
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FOR RELEASE: Monday, September 23, 1985

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Chief Justice Robert N. Wilentz announced today the formation of a task force to recommend ways in which the Judiciary can become more responsive to problems faced by racial, ethnic and cultural minorities.

The Chief Justice said the New Jersey Supreme Court decided in July to establish the Task Force on Minority Concerns after an initial review by a study committee identified problems deserving attention.

A core group of 16 Task Force members, headed by Superior Court Judge Theodore Z. Davis of Camden, has begun its work and will be expanded after the first phase is complete in six months.

The Task Force will deal with such concerns as minority access to justice, minority participation in the judicial process, the criminal justice system and the minority defendant, and minority youth in the juvenile justice system.

The concerns were expressed in an internal study report prepared by a committee which the Chief Justice established in June, 1984. The committee, which recommended a permanent task force, conducted several meetings in June and July, 1984, including one with community representatives.

Robert D. Lipscher, administrative director of the courts, said, "the preliminary committee provided the Court with a list of concerns based upon perceptions of problems as they saw them, but was not asked to provide documentation nor to distinguish whether problems were rooted in racial bias or whether

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Shirley Tolentino of Hudson, Cornelius P. Sullivan of Burlington and Elliott G. Heard Jr. of Gloucester. The three municipal judge members are Severiano Lisboa II of Jersey City, Paulette Sapp of Trenton and Julio M. Fuentes of Newark.

The Task Force will study what factors contribute to the high incidence of minority youth involvement with the juvenile justice system.

Among the issues the Task Force will address are whether minority defendants are hampered by present bail policies in preparing their defense, whether there is proportionate minority representation on juries, whether minority defendants receive equal access to adequate legal representation, and probation and pre-trial intervention services, and whether there is disparity in the plea-bargaining or sentencing.

The Task Force also is directed to study whether or not race or ethnicity affects the treatment received from judicial personnel or their decisions.

In addition, the Task Force will assess the present level of minority participation in the judicial process at all levels--as employes, committee and task force members, jurors, expert witnesses and court-appointed counsel.

The Task Force was invited to consider such strategies as greater flexibility in court scheduling policies to minimize the inconvenience and cost of obtaining justice; more extensive community programs to familiarize minorities with the judicial process, and increasing the awareness and sensitivity of judicial personnel.

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